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Crescendo! The Newsletter of the Buffalo Gay Men's  
Chorus

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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Winter 2009

# Crescendo!, Winter 2009

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

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# Crescendo!

The Newsletter of  
the Buffalo Gay  
Men's Chorus, Inc.

Volume 7 • Issue 2  
Winter 2009

## Amazing turnout for holiday concerts

The audiences for "Hope for the Holidays" were tremendous. The BGMC filled three large venues (the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, Trinity Episcopal Church, and the Hamburg United Methodist Church) to standing room only crowds on December 12-13-14. Those who came to the concerts were enthusiastic and appreciative of all the work that went into producing such professional and enjoyable programs. While it is not easy to rehearse "White Christmas" while still wearing shorts and tee shirts in September, the men of the chorus felt it was important to offer both fine entertainment and solid performances in their first ever holiday concert.

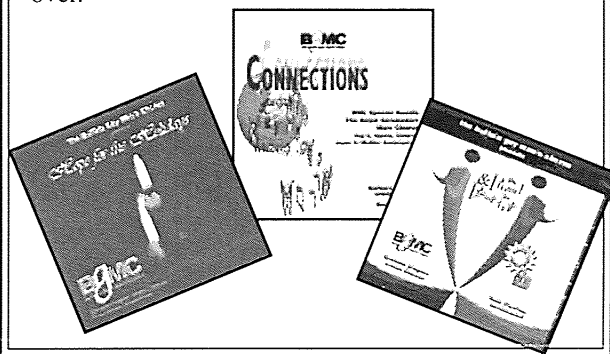
In addition to singing the magnificent repertoire selected by artistic director Barbara Wagner, the entire chorus managed to memorize all of the music in order to better engage and to show their respect for their audiences. It was, indeed, spectacular!

The most gratifying aspect of filling those houses was the fact that the BGMC was in direct competition with the Buffalo Philharmonic, Buffalo Choral Arts, and St. Paul's Cathedral for the time and entertainment budget of Western New Yorkers. Each of these groups is outstanding and each provides their audiences with fine choral music. We trust that they, too, filled their respective houses with delighted audiences. Mostly, we are very grateful that so many choral lovers opted to keep company with the chorus on that weekend.

## Thank you for loving our CDs

Even we were astounded by the sale of not only our holiday CDs, but also our other CDs. You bought them for yourself and you bought them to give as gifts. Your support of the BGMC as audience members, contributors to the arts, program advertisers, and purchasers of our CDs allows us to continue to provide you with the very best in choral music.

You can go to [www.buffalogaymenschorus.org](http://www.buffalogaymenschorus.org) to see what is still available. Hopefully, you will wish to collect all of our CDs and enjoy them over and over.



*The chorus lifts a glass to friendship, a number from the holiday concert.*



*Brothers in song!*

*Photos by Mike Longo*

# President's Column

by G. Michael Liska, BGMC President



Thanks to our loyal patrons, the "Hope for the Holidays" concert series proved to be an overwhelming success. The men of the BGMC dazzled three sold out audiences for our first holiday event. Letters of praise and thanks are still coming into the BGMC website and office with reflections on how our program brought the spirit of the season to everyone who attended. The event validates the increasing importance BGMC has in our community.

Just three days later, the chorus performed at the South UB campus for WBFO as part of their on going concert series. Once again, the BGMC packed the house. Host Bert Gambini noted that ours was the most-attended concert that they have ever had. As part of the NPR network productions, our voices were broadcast worldwide. Our experiences continue to rack up memories of beautiful moments shared.

In a city where many have suffered economic setbacks, our patrons have remained steadfast in their devotion to the art of beautiful choral music. The melodious sounds of the male voice have grown increasingly more popular with each concert series BGMC performs. Our regular guests spread the word that we will be singing a concert, and each event grows in attendance.

The welcoming audiences, applauding for more as we end our concerts, never cease to amaze. As people file by us on their way to the reception, they invariably say that we look as if we enjoy what we do. That is a dramatic understatement. We rehearse over and over, week after week, to meet the expectations of our fans. The commitment and dedication of each of our members comes naturally. We enjoy the fellowship and love we share with each other during the weeks we are together. During the short break after our June concerts, it seems like we are apart forever.

I would like to personally express my appreciation for my BGMC brothers. Each of you has become so important in my life. The friendships developed are so meaningful. I am proud to be a member of such an incredible group of men. We sing to change

hearts and minds. We forge bonds with each other because of our own needs. We support each other during tough times and encourage each other until better days arrive. I can't imagine my life without the men of the BGMC. This is a life changing organization of love and understanding. Once a BGMC brother, you remain in our hearts always.

So, for now, I, again, say thanks to all who made our holiday concert a huge success. Our volunteers are the greatest and our artistic director, Barb Wagner, is the most amazing friend our chorus could have. Her talents have made this chorus award-winning. Thanks to Debi Overton our accompanist through the years. And, above all, we thank our loyal fans. Without your continued support, we could not serve our community's needs.

We will see you all at one of our next concerts, March 20, 21, 22.

Happy, safe and healthy New Year to all!

Sincerely,  
Mike (Spike) Liska

## Even if you are straight...

you are invited to join the chorus as a singer. We have several straight fellows who love singing with us. If you're straight and want to audition, contact our artistic director Barb Wagner at wagschoir@verizon.net for a voice placement.

You, too, can change the world through song.

**BGMC**  
The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus

## Crescendo!

The Newsletter of the  
Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc.

Volume 7 • Issue 2 • Winter 2009

Editor: **Delwyn Milander**  
Designer: **Vilardo Printing**

**Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc.**  
Incorporated 2001 as a 501 (c)(3)  
not-for-profit corporation in the  
State of New York.

Artistic Director: **Barbara Wagner**  
Accompanist: **Debi Overton**

News & Information Director:  
**Kathleen Bryce Niles**

**Officers 2008-2009**  
President: **G. Michael Liska**  
Vice President: **Christopher Babbitt**  
Secretary: **Jason Higbee**  
Treasurer: **William H. Gardner**  
Directors: **Dave Batt, Norm Duttweiler, Jr., Darrin Kahn, Dave Mathewson, Ryan McKane**

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The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc. is a member of the **Gay and Lesbian Association of Chorus, Inc. (GALA Choruses)**. GALA Choruses fosters the artistic and organizational development of member choruses through a variety of programs and services.

For more information, visit  
[www.galachoruses.org](http://www.galachoruses.org)

## Barb's Corner

by Barbara Wagner, BGMC Artistic Director

We're in the midst of preparations for our next concert, "The Land Where the Good Songs Go," but first I want to tell you just a little of how amazing the response was to all the work we did in the fall to prepare for our very first series of holiday concerts. The preparation was almost as much fun as doing the concerts for sold out houses at each venue. We were thrilled with the arrangement of "Thankful" that Jason Higbee commissioned for us. "Hard Candy Christmas" turned out to be one of the loveliest holiday songs I'd ever heard. Even the old Bing Crosby version of "White Christmas" felt new and fresh.

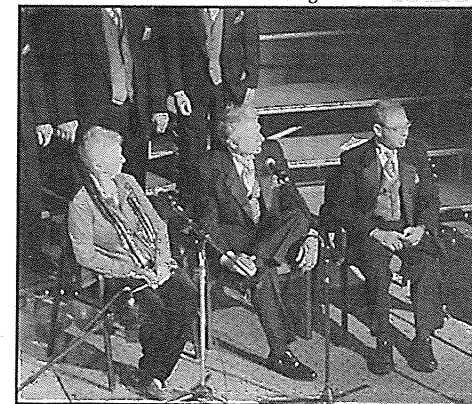
Our audiences seemed as delighted as we were. They bought our newly minted CDs and they thanked us over and over again in Hamburg for making the trip to the Southtowns. Memorization is new and not easy for us, but it was worth all the time it took, when our fans recognized that we had done it to show how much we appreciate them.

The following week, we went to Allen Hall on the UB South Campus, where we sang some of our holiday songs again in front of a full house and for WBFO, the NPR affiliated radio station there. Everywhere, our audiences never failed to be touched by one of our favorite songs, "Finally Here." We even had new people audition for the chorus because of that song of hope and affirmation.

We're moving on and looking forward to the March series. The idea of calling a concert "The Land Where the Good Songs Go" was born after Russ Link played a recording of the song of the same title for me one lovely spring day. I was totally enchanted and then he told me that the song had been composed by Jerome Kern in 1917, set to a text by P.G. Wodehouse the writer. That was it.

Off I went to see Phil Sims, our new favorite arranger, and he produced an arrangement for men's chorus, violin and piano that is just as charming as I had hoped it would be. Finding old

Photo credits: William Ingalls and WBFO



Barb, Spike and Roger Parris during their interview at the WBFO performance.

songs has been a delight for many of us. The singers made so many wonderful suggestions that it was almost impossible to choose, but choose we did.

There's a bit more Jerome Kern, a taste of Gilbert and Sullivan, a dollop of Irving Berlin, a sprinkling of Rachmaninoff (yes, his songs are old, too) a tiny scoop of Lerner and Loewe, a bit of Brahms and many more musical treats. The music is diverse, as always, and we hope you'll all come and help us celebrate the beginning of spring with this delightful music.

Most of the program notes will be written by Jason Ward, who is an expert on many kinds of music. What he doesn't already know, he finds out almost instantly. All I'll have to ask Jason is "can you find me a copy of "Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh" and I'll have it in a couple of days. That's not only a tribute to Jason but just a little bit of a hint about what our June concert will be about.

Thank you for all you do to support the BGMC and we'll see you at one of the next concerts, March 20, 21, or 22.

Love,

*Barb*

Photo credits: William Ingalls and WBFO



Shaun Doyle sings his solo at the WBFO performance.

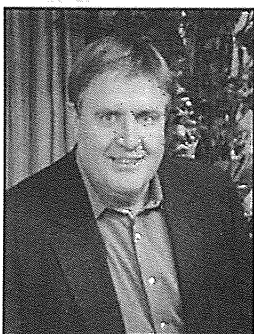
## Variety is the key

While our singers are predominantly gay men, we do not perform the stereotypic "gay music" repertoire. From the beginning we decided that the BGMC would be first and foremost a fine men's chorus whose repertoire would be challenging, unique and of interest to those who enjoy male choral singing in the finest tradition.

When you leave one of our concerts think of how much you enjoyed hearing the BGMC and how much you enjoyed hearing the music in a new and appealing way.

This does not mean that some day we might not simply throw caution to the wind and present an all-Broadway show. There's a lot of other music we want to do first.





## In the spotlight: Brian Rotach

interview by Kathleen Bryce Niles, photo by Roger Parris

Trying to shine the "Spotlight" on a man like Brian Rotach is not a simple task. While he is a bright and witty fellow, he is definitely not one to seek the limelight. Although he did a star turn in the holiday concerts as a craggy Scotsman in "You're a Mean One Mister Grinch" that featured his shaking a malevolent finger at the audience, getting him to be forthcoming with a lot of personal information hasn't been easy. Nevertheless, the basics are sufficient to give us a modicum of insight into a very decent, kind and giving man.

The Reverend Brian Rotach was born in Rochester, New York "a few decades ago." He lives in Amherst with his wife, Cheryl Bird, who directs the Center for Sustainable Communities and Civic Engagement at Daemen College. Brian holds a B.Mus. in Music Education from SUNY Fredonia and a Master of Divinity from Howard University, Washington, DC.

As the pastor of the Seneca Street United Methodist Church in the Seneca Babcock neighborhood of Buffalo, Brian's ministry is centered in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city. The church focuses on both adults and children who are at risk. The mission of the church is to disrupt the cycle of generational poverty by offering role models, educational expectations, enrichment and food as well as emotional and spiritual support.

Brian believes that the time for marriage equality and equal employment opportunity is NOW. And, in the spirit of his beliefs, he joined the BGMC to both sing "with this wonderful chorus," and "to bear witness that not all straights are narrow."

Brian admits to a few hobbies but gives them almost no time at all. In his own words, "I'm all about pouring my life into providing a place where disadvantaged kids and their moms can feel some encouragement and recover some hope."

That's good enough for us and ample reason to proudly salute Brian Rotach as this issue's Spotlight Guy.

## Let us be a "favorite"

We have a wonderful website thanks to the time and effort of board member Norm Duttweiler. We hope you will find a place for it on your "favorite" list. It is filled with pictures, music, and information. Please keep the BGMC in your hearts, minds, and computer wanderings all year long. Our website is [www.buffalogaymenschorus.org](http://www.buffalogaymenschorus.org).

## Celebration of music for the children of Roswell

As this edition of Crescendo went to press, the chorus prepared to highlight an evening in support of the children at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. The concert was Saturday, February 7, at Good Shepherd Community of Faith in South Buffalo.

The men of the chorus consider it a part of their mission to give back to the community that supports them so much. That's why you see the BGMC out and about at events like this.

Please support the organizations that we support through our special appearances.

## MOCHA benefit brings groups together

The BGMC donated much time and energy to a very worthy cause on Saturday, October 25. The outstanding Men of Color Health Awareness Project presented awards to some of the individuals who have supported this effort in both Rochester and Buffalo. For one hour preceding the award ceremony, the BGMC sang for those in attendance. Many standing ovations and thunderous clapping rewarded the chorus as they offered, among other pieces, "Down to the River to Pray." "The Storm is Passing Over" and the commissioned piece "Yes!!" composed by African-American Dr. Adolphus Hailstork and based upon the poem by Harlem Renaissance writer Countee Cullen entitled "Tableau."

This event is one of many benefit performances that the BGMC does for other non-profit groups.

Honored guests included: Donald J. Lee, NYSDOH Aids Institute Contract Manager; Thomas Ferrarese, Democratic Commissioner, Monroe County Board of Elections; Leadership Buffalo, Inc.; NYS Senator Antoine M. Thompson, and Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter.

## BGMC highlights Fredonia diversity concert

Members of the BGMC took to the road, as they often do, on November 7. This time it was to support the Pride Alliance of SUNY Fredonia at the end of their Diversity Week Calendar of Events. The program noted: "We have sung all over WNY and beyond to large audiences and been told that not only our musical, but also our social impact has been unprecedented. The existence of this chorus in the relatively conservative Western New York community has helped us make great strides in acceptance and equality for the GLTB community. We have tried very hard to be a positive model for those who are grappling with the negativity all too often imposed on homosexuals. The chorus has been an important factor in raising the self-esteem of a historically marginalized society."

## Trade ads make sense

The BGMC does some trade ad exchanges with other arts and news groups. We negotiate the size of our ad and the size of their ad in our programs in a fair and equitable manner. Trade ads make the most sense for non-profit groups who have a finite advertising budget. Through them, all audiences can see what shows are upcoming in the theater and halls in Western New York. If you think a trade ad would work between your organization and the BGMC, please contact Kathleen Bryce Niles at [kniles11@verizon.net](mailto:kniles11@verizon.net) for further discussion.

Photo by Mike Longo

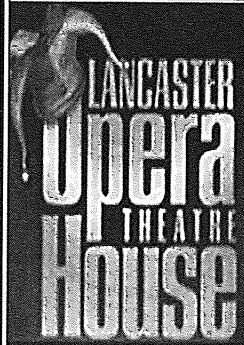


The chorus by candlelight in the holiday concert.




Jason Higbee trumpet soloist in "Thankful" at WBFO.

Photo credits: William Ingalls and WBFO



**Lancaster Opera House**  
21 Central Avenue  
Lancaster, NY 14086  
716-683-1776 [www.lancopera.org](http://www.lancopera.org)



**The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus**

*Singing with pride since 2001*

**FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2009 @ 7:30 PM**





Presents

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Featuring a performance  
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Non-Profit of your choosing  
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**Tickets: \$30.00**

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**www.buffalogaymenschorus.org**

**or from a friendly**

**BGMC chorus member**

**BGMC Office:**

**695 Elmwood Avenue**

**Buffalo, NY 14222**

**716.883.1277**

## The economy hits us too

As with all things elective, the state of the economy impacts the arts heavily. We all have to tighten the proverbial belt and make hard decisions about our entertainment budget. We travel less, dine out less, go to fewer shows and concerts. It is a sign of the times.

While we trust that you will take care of your family first, we hope that you will remember what the BGMC has brought to your life. Even if the check has to be a bit less than it was in flush times, please write one anyway. We understand.

We still need you in order to be the BGMC that you applaud and sustain.

## Advertising your business is good business

The chorus produces three concert programs in a concert season. These are read and kept by hundreds of consumers. Our ad rates are competitive and very fair. Ads purchased by community members to present their business often include realtors, attorneys, car dealers, churches, non-profit groups, therapists, community activists and supporters, restaurants, salons, antique dealers, and others interested in the patronage of our audiences. Please contact Russ Link at (716) 881-1418 for further information.

## Program notes add to the concerts

Artistic director, Barbara Wagner, has been a force in Western New York music for well over forty years. Just take a look at her bio in one of our programs. Besides all that she has accomplished, Barb has a very special gift for selecting unique, interesting, informative, lyrical, and creative pieces of music for every concert.

One of the reasons that people return over and over to hear the BGMC is the manner in which each concert is programmed. The chorus' mission speaks of "educating, enlightening and entertaining" and it is Barb who packs each performance with the music that does just that.

The next time you visually stroll through one of the programs be sure to look at the choices and read the program notes on each piece that Barb and Jason Ward put in for your interest and edification.

It will enhance your enjoyment of the concert.

## Auditions for the BGMC

The chorus is always open to new singers. If you like to sing and enjoy the camaraderie of a gay men's chorus you are invited to join us.

The basic requirement is the ability to match pitch. The rest will follow. Call artistic director, Barb Wagner, at 668-1124 or wagschoir@verizon.net to make an appointment.

## Kudos to:

Rob Szustak, a member of the Harmonic Chamber Singers, for the concert last November;

Matt Mooney for his role in "Little Shop of Horrors" at the Lancaster Opera House last fall;

Ryan McDonald for doing the eBlast each week;

BGMC singers who caroled at The Mansion during the holiday season and chorus members who contributed to Brian Rotach's project aiding the families of his parish, Seneca Street United Methodist Church;

Members of the Gay Men's Chorus of Washington D.C. who performed at the Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial on January 18. This was the first time a GALA chorus has sung at an inaugural ceremony;

Bill Hardy for his video collage "Finally Here—A Celebration of Men Loving Men" on YouTube. Check it out by going to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and typing in Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus;

Barb, Dave Mathewson, Darrin Kahn, and Jaime Goldfuss for producing the practice CD for the upcoming March concerts.

*(Inadvertent omissions are inevitable. If you have suggestions for the next Kudos list, please pass them along to the editor.)*



## Biggest audience ever for WBFO radio

Just a few days after filling three halls with the sold out "Hope for the Holidays" concerts, the BGMC provided WBFO radio with its largest in-studio audience to date. The show was performed live so it was very interesting to watch how the program unfolded. Barb, President "Spike" Liska, and Roger Parris joined the host half way through the performance to answer some questions and to offer some insights into the evolution of the chorus. Then, it was right back to performing more outstanding music for the studio and listening audience.

WBFO serves over 100,000 listeners daily and is a National Public Radio station. Although UB holds their license and provides student interns, WBFO is a professional station. While artistic director Barbara Wagner, accompanist Debi Overton, and the singers were in need of a hiatus from performing, it was their pleasure to work with WBFO and all look forward to future engagements with them.

## Volunteers needed for concerts

Putting on three concerts takes a great deal of effort on the part of our staff and our singers. We are often in need of assistance from volunteers who are willing to take patrons to their seats, sell tickets, and meet and greet. Our house manager, Damian Tremblay, provides good direction and support to all volunteers. If you would like the opportunity to help out at one or more concerts, please contact us at by calling the chorus telephone number or contacting us through the website.

## Our receptions are historic

Very few organizations provide their audiences with outstanding dessert receptions after the concert. It has become a tradition for the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus to meet their guests after each concert and to encourage them to enjoy ice cream punch and a vast array of outstanding desserts. Our patrons do not have to go to another venue to relax and talk about the concert experience and spend more money to do so. Barbara, Debi, and all of the singers are at the receptions to answer your questions, bask in your accolades, and let you know that no matter how many people we serve, you are important to us.

Please don't miss this wonderful experience.

Photos from the WBFO performance. More photos can be seen at their website [www.wbfo.org](http://www.wbfo.org) and click on audio archive.



Photo credits: William Ingalls and WBFO

## Chorus sings for Burchfield Penney opening

The new Burchfield Penney Art Center opened its doors with special events and free admission on the campus of Buffalo State in late November. In keeping with the tradition of performing for other non-profit arts groups in Western New York, the BGMC was pleased to present a concert for the enjoyment of art lovers on Friday, November 28 in the brand new auditorium.

Artistic Director, Barbara Wagner, accompanied and conducted the chorus through a half dozen songs and an encore. The men in tuxedos fit in very well with the outstanding art and sculpture that fill this magnificent new space. We are firmly committed to the belief that in working in harmony with other groups, whether it be a benefit concert for an agency that serves the community or another group of artists whose mission is to make the world of beauty that exists in and around all of us accessible to everyone, that we are fulfilling our own commitment to all of the people of WNY.

## The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus presents *The Land Where the Good Songs Go*

Friday, March 20, 2009 at 8pm  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo  
695 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo

Saturday, March 21, 2009 at 8pm  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
1080 Main Street, Buffalo  
Interpreted for the hearing impaired

Sunday, March 22, 2009 at 4pm  
Daemen College  
4380 Main Street, Amherst

\$20 for adults  
\$18 seniors and disabled  
Seating is available 1 hour prior to concert



Barbara Wagner, Artistic Director  
Debi Overton, Accompanist  
[www.buffalogaymenschorus.org](http://www.buffalogaymenschorus.org)  
716-883-1277

## SAVE THESE DATES!

Friday, March 20, 2009 • Winter Concert • **The Land Where the Good Songs Go** • Unitarian Universalist Church  
695 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY @ 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 21, 2009 • Winter Concert • **The Land Where the Good Songs Go** • Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
1080 Main Street, Buffalo, NY @ 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 22, 2009 • Winter Concert • **The Land Where the Good Songs Go** • Daemen College  
4380 Main Street, Amherst, NY @ 4:00 p.m.

Friday, April 17, 2009 • **Lancaster Opera House** • 21 Central Avenue, Lancaster, NY @ 7:30 pm.

Saturday, May 16, 2009 • **Diamonds and Pearls Cabaret** • Pearl Street Brewery • 76 Pearl Street, downtown Buffalo  
Doors open @ 7:00 p.m.

Friday, June 19, 2009 • Spring Concert • **BGMC on Vacation** • Unitarian Universalist Church • 695 Elmwood Avenue, Buffalo, NY @ 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, June 20, 2009 • Spring Concert • **BGMC on Vacation** • First Presbyterian Church • One Symphony Circle, Buffalo, NY @ 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, June 21, 2009 • Spring Concert • **BGMC on Vacation** • Church of the Nativity United Church of Christ  
1530 Colvin Blvd., Kenmore, NY @ 4:00 p.m.



Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus, Inc.  
695 Elmwood Ave.  
Buffalo, NY 14222

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
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Permit No. 908  
Buffalo, N.Y.

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Cut along dotted line and mail bottom portion with your donation today to: **BGMC, 695 Elmwood Ave., Buffalo, NY 14222.**

**Yes, I'll join the Friends of the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus!**

*Thank you for helping the growth & success of BGMC. Your contribution is tax deductible.*

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*In honor of* \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Would you like your name to appear in our next program? (Please PRINT exactly how you would like your name to appear.) \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Check here if you do NOT want your name to appear in our program. \_\_\_\_\_

**Friends who contribute at the \$200 "Conductor" level and above will receive two tickets to our next concert.**

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☐ Please add me to the BGMC mailing list.

☐ I have time or services that may help the BGMC. Please contact me.